

Reynar, A.H.

Ebenezer: address on Methodism

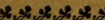
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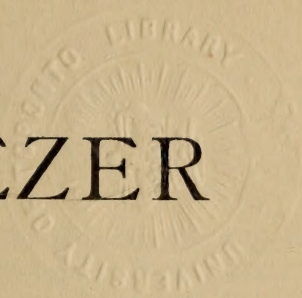
Address on Methodism

ITS SIGNIFICANCE AND
ITS HISTORY 

*Delivered at the Closing Service of the
Methodist Church, Cobourg, July 8th,
1900, by the Rev. A. H. Reynar.*



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EBENEZER



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TORONTO:
WILLIAM BRIGGS.
1900.

EBENEZER.

THE particular occasion of our meeting this evening—the last service in our old church, cannot be considered a joyful one in the common sense of the word, for there are many pensive and some sad memories suggested by it. Neither do we consider it a sad occasion, for it brings to mind the causes of thanksgiving for the past and grounds of hope for the future. But it is an exceedingly interesting occasion. It is a time when we raise our Ebenezer, when we thank God for all the way in which He has led us and take courage to move forward at His command.

The duty laid upon me to-night is that of giving you a retrospect of the work of God connected with this church, in which we now meet for the last time. And as the retrospect is a long one, I enter upon it without further introduction. I give it in three parts: (I.) The rise of Methodism and its true significance; (II.) The introduction of Methodism into this country; and (III.) The growth of Methodism in this church.

I.

The religious movement called Methodism was not a new doctrinal system, the doctrines taught by the Methodists being those generally taught in the Church of England.* And it was not a new ecclesiastical organization and discipline. Neither was it a new form of worship. But it was a new spirit—a spirit that took the religion of the gospel seriously, and

*Of course this refers to the time of John Wesley. Much that is now taught in Anglican churches would have astonished the churchmen of John Wesley's day.

that insisted upon a personal experience of the things prepared for us in the Christian dispensation—more particularly of a heartfelt repentance toward God and a sincere faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, a faith that brings a conscious peace with God, and that works in love to all mankind. Such, and such only, was the original spirit and aim of Methodism. But it was a despised thing at that time by most of the great and privileged, despised and persecuted by many of those who should have been the first to welcome and help it. This is all changed now, and the great modern historians of the English people recognize it as one of the most important movements of history, and one to which the English people owe much of the greatness to which they have risen in modern times. But this movement, which was originally nothing but a new awakening to moral earnestness and purpose, was forced in self-defence to create a new organization, to adopt new forms of worship, and to determine within certain broad limits its doctrinal statements and standards. The new wine would have been spilled and lost if it had not been put into new bottles.

It was with extreme reluctance that the great leader of the new movement took the steps necessary to the organization of the separate ecclesiastical body, but that reluctance was equalled by the unflinching courage with which he took those steps, whenever it became clear to him that the change was necessary to preserve and extend the original spirit of Methodism, and carry on its work. He never separated from the Church of England, but he over-stepped the discipline of that Church in a way no churchman can forgive. He rejected the doctrine of Apostolical Succession, saying, "I could never see it proved and I am persuaded I never shall." (Works, III. 454, XIII. 251.) But to a churchman of the strictest sect to-day the Apostolical Succession is essential to the very being of a Church. Again, Wesley denied that there were three orders of the clergy, and said, "Bishops and Presbyters are essentially one order." (II. 64, XIII. 253.) He went further and exercised the powers of a bishop in the ordination of some of his preachers, especially for the Church in the United States, immediately after they had secured their independence. And

this he did rather than seek ordination for them at the hands of the English bishops. In justification of his action he says: "As our American brethren are now totally disengaged from the state and from the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in the liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free." (XIII. 252.)

The Methodists of to-day use the very same language as did John Wesley. They would not be unwilling to take their place in a national church as churchmen after the school of John Wesley, but not after the school of some who teach what they are pleased to call Church principles—principles that John Wesley repudiates as contrary to the Scriptures and the Primitive Church.

When urged to organize the Methodists in England in a similar way, Wesley hesitated, not because of any sacerdotal scruples, but because of his respect for a National Church established by the law of the land. (XIII. 256-7.) He believed that it was still lawful to continue in the Church, but he confessed that he could not answer the arguments in favor of a separate and independent organization, and that his conclusion that it was lawful to remain in the Church stood "almost without any premises" to bear its weight. "That I have not gone too far yet I know, but whether I have gone far enough I am extremely doubtful." (XIII. 208.) To the end of his life he kept this position with these misgivings, but in his famous legal document the Deed of Declaration, enrolled in chancery, he provided for the untrammelled freedom of the Methodists after his death in order, as his own words say, "to fix them upon such a foundation as is likely to stand as long as the sun and moon endure." (XIII. 250.)

I will not say that the division which then took place is without some disadvantages. It would have been to our mortal thinking more happy if the Church of England had known the day of her visitation, and kept within her own fold the millions of the English people in the old land, and in the greater Britain of modern times. Had they done so, the Church

of England and the Church of the English people would be one and the same. I cannot but regret that such is not the case. As the English race has by stubbornness and mismanagement been so divided that the English in the United States outnumber the English in Great Britain and Ireland, so has a similar ecclesiastical mismanagement resulted in the fact that the Church of England is no longer the Church of the English, for there are now more Methodists in English-speaking lands than there are members of the Church of England. I will not say that this state of things is without some great disadvantages, but I will say that it is much better for the whole world that the new spirit was provided with a new body in which to live and grow, than that it should have been overborne and lost in the sluggishness and earthliness of the National Church as it was in those days. So it was with the great reformation of the sixteenth century. The division of western Christendom into papal and anti-papal parties is not altogether happy, but it is far happier and better even for the Church of Rome than would have been a result like that of the Wycliffe Reformation and that of the Bohemian Reformation, which were strangled in the bosom of the Church.

In our times there is some feeling after a reunion of the churches—Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian and others. We rejoice in this feeling of brotherly love, and we are sure that the Methodists will be the first to welcome such reunion whenever it can be had without sacrifice of the truth and freedom with which God has blessed them. When the supreme importance of a personal experience of the things of God is assured, and a direct relation of the soul to God, apart from all priestly intrusion, then and then only can we be yoked together again with those from whom we have been separated. There are some good people, and even learned people, who honestly think that sacerdotalism is of the essence of Christianity, but there are many others just as godly, just as disinterested, and just as learned who honestly hold that sacerdotalism is no part whatever of the religion of Jesus Christ and His apostles, but rather a survival and intrusion of Judaism and heathenism. In the old time there were many

learned and godly men, counsellors and kings, bishops and popes, as well as millions of humbler folk, who honestly believed in alchemy and astrology, and the divine right of kings, who believed that the earth was a plane and the centre of the solar system and of the universe. So now there are those who still believe in sacerdotalism and the divine right of bishops, and yet they are, many of them, learned and godly men, and men entitled to our respect and love, not, however, for their false opinions, but for their true moral and spiritual worth, and for the love of God and man that transpires in their daily lives.

II.

The second part of our retrospect deals with the introduction of this new movement into the new world—the coming of Methodism to America and Canada.

New intellectual or moral and spiritual movements often follow the great courses of conquest, colonization and commerce. In the first century Roman soldiers and traders brought Christianity to Britain. In the sixteenth century the new learning and the reformation spread in the same way through Germany, Italy and Spain, the Netherlands, France and England, and in the eighteenth century it was once again soldiers and traders and colonists who carried Methodism across the seas to America, and to the greater Britain in every quarter of the globe.

The story may be familiar to many of you, but it may be briefly repeated for the benefit of the younger people.

In 1758 Wesley found in Ireland some German communities who had been driven from their homes on the Rhine about fifty years before that time. Amongst these people Methodism did a good work in helping them from drunkenness and profanity to sober, godly living. Some of these good people emigrated to the new world. But without the old helps in their religious life, many of them were backsliding into their former ways of drunkenness, profanity and gambling. There was, however, a good woman among them named Barbara Heck, who stirred up a local preacher, named Philip Embury, to do his work as

an evangelist and testify against the prevailing carelessness of life. This he seemed ready to do, and in his own humble dwelling, with a congregation of five persons, he began the work that has broadened into the Methodism of the United States and Canada, with its millions of adherents and its world-wide activities. A Captain Webb, from the garrison at Albany, converted three years before in Bristol, came to Embury's assistance. In about two years they built the first Methodist place of worship in America—Wesley Chapel on John Street, New York. Next year help was sent from England, and the work prospered till the breaking out of the war of Independence. Yes, and throughout all the distractions of the war from its outbreak in 1775 to its close in 1783, the work spread, so that at the close of the war there were of the Methodists some eighty-five preachers and fourteen thousand members.

We now come to our own country. At the close of the War of Independence, many of the colonists who had supported the motherland in the Revolutionary War, determined to find new homes for themselves under the old flag in the north land of Canada. Then began the emigration or, to use a newly adopted word, the great trek of the U. E. Loyalists. Disposing of their property for anything it would bring, sometimes giving it away, or even abandoning it altogether, they left their old homes and went, some of them, over seas to New Brunswick and the other Maritime Provinces, and others overland, often footsore and famished, to the banks of the St. Lawrence and shores of the great lakes. Naturally they selected lands as near as possible to the sparse settlements in the country at that time. Those settlements were along the lines of water communication by river and lake used by the settlers, and before them by the old Canadian voyageurs, and in still earlier times by the native Indians. The great course was up the St. Lawrence and along the Bay of Quinte. Others took another course by the Niagara and the shores of Lake Erie, and up the Grand River. These Loyalist emigrants were well received, as was only just, by the Government of Canada. A free grant of two hundred acres was given to each of their children. In this way justice was done and the best settlers secured for Canada,

With this people came many Methodists, and amongst them the Hecks and some of the Emburys, who had made the first efforts to establish Methodism in New York. These good people continued their good work in Canada till their loyal dust was laid to rest in the quiet churchyards on the banks of the St. Lawrence.

Once again in this country it was by soldiers that the first conquests for Methodism were attempted and achieved. A local preacher named Tuffy, of the 44th regiment, was the first to begin in the Province and City of Quebec in 1780, and a Major Neal, another Irish Methodist, was the first in Ontario, at Niagara, 1786.

In 1788 Lyons, a school teacher at Adolphustown, on the Bay of Quinte, threw himself into the work of an evangelist and showed himself wise to win souls. The same year Charles Justin McCarthy began in Canada the testimony by which he saved others, but that led him to a martyr's death and crown.

We have now come to familiar names and familiar ground. Many of us have seen the venerable form of a son of this Charles Justin McCarthy on the streets of Cobourg and in this very church, and most of you know something of a granddaughter of his, still living amongst us, whose many public and private benefactions will be long remembered. McCarthy was a Whitfield Methodist. He came over from the United States to visit friends in the neighborhood of Kingston. He was a man of attractive manners and speech, and his evangelistic labors were made a blessing to many. But the local authorities, who were animated by a religious bigotry and intolerance—now, thank God, quite impotent if not quite dead—had him arrested as a vagrant and sentenced to banishment. He is supposed to have perished directly or indirectly at the hands of the brutal men who were charged to transport him from this country to the United States. Certain it is that from that time he absolutely disappeared, and his persecutors and their agents never saw fit to throw light on his fate. He may properly be regarded as the proto-martyr of Methodism in Canada.

In 1790 the first Methodist itinerant preacher appeared in this country. At that time the Methodists of the United

States were extending their work into their own northern country, and one of them, Wm. Losee, received a roving commission to go into the regions beyond, the farthest north of that day, and bring the good tidings of a full and free and present salvation to the distant and scattered settlements on the Canadian border. Losee, a Loyalist himself, soon found his way to the emigrant Loyalists on the Bay of Quinte. He had great success, and organized the first Methodist circuit in Canada, called the Kingston Circuit.

In 1792 were built the first Methodist churches, one at Hay Bay and the other at Ernesttown. It was by an interesting coincidence that the first Upper Canada Parliament was held at Niagara, and the first General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States was held in Baltimore in the same year. There were in 1792 two Methodist circuits, that from Kingston west called the Cataraqui Circuit, and that from Kingston east to Cornwall called the Oswegotchie Circuit.

In 1795 the Methodists of the Niagara region secured a missionary, and were added to the regular work of the Church. This year is further noticeable in our history for the transfer of the seat of the Provincial Government from Niagara to York, or Toronto, as it is now called.

III.

The third chapter of our retrospect or Methodism in Cobourg now comes before us.

The year 1800, or exactly one hundred years ago, saw the regular beginning of Methodism in this place. Till that time Cobourg, with the region about it, was on the western limit of the Bay of Quinte Circuit, but in the minutes of 1801 it appears for the first time under the name of "Bay of Quinte, with Smith's Creek," and it appears later as the "Smith's Creek Circuit." The creek which gives the name is that discharging into Lake Ontario at Port Hope.

In 1805 Smith's Creek appears again, but now it is connected with Yonge Street. An early Church historian writes :

“Though the Yonge Street and Smith’s Creek Circuits were of large extent, yet the population was scanty, the preaching places few and far between. A preacher might ride through a township before he found the little settlement and the log-house in which he was to preach, and a couple of townships before he came to the next appointment.”

The war between the Mother Country and the United States in 1812-14, with all its distractions and sufferings, naturally hindered to some extent the work of the Church. It is not for us now to discuss the folly and wickedness of that war, but however much we may have suffered in it, we cannot look back upon it with shame. The young Canadians doing battle in South Africa to-day are not doing more than might have been expected of the grandsons of the men of 1812-14. Canadians did their duty in those days and they are only doing their duty now.

The Methodist preachers and people also did their duty at that time. They stood by their work and managed their own affairs without help and without oversight. It is pleasing, however, to see that though political foes, the Methodists of Canada and those of the United States were at one in the affairs of the Kingdom of God, and brought comfort to each other in the suffering of the battlefield, and in the weary days that fell to prisoners of war.

In 1824 the Methodists of Canada were formed into a separate Conference. The first meeting of the Conference was held in Hallowell, now Picton. Four years later, or in 1828, this Canadian Conference was made independent of the Church in the United States. It was by a large majority that the General Conference resolved on this action, and though it was strongly opposed by some, the opponents themselves accepted the decision in the best spirit.

In 1825 Cobourg was made a separate circuit, and in 1826 the Hamilton Conference was held. The Cobourg people of this generation will feel more interest in this early Conference when they know that it was not held in the City of Hamilton, but in the township of Hamilton, about two miles north of Cobourg, where now stands the little church at Hull’s Corners.

This Conference, and a camp-meeting that accompanied it, was further remarkable for the conversion of the heathen Indians, who were saved by scores and added to the Church.

The year 1827 saw the arrival in Cobourg of a young assistant preacher, whose memory will live with the history of this country. He was much interested in the Indian work as well as in the work amongst the settlers throughout the country. Many years later he wrote: "At the Conference of 1827 I was appointed to the Cobourg Circuit, extending from Bowmanville Village to the Trent, including Port Hope, Cobourg, Haldimand, Colborne, Brighton, and the whole country south of Rice Lake, with the townships of Seymour and Murray. On this extensive and laborious Circuit I am not aware that I missed a single appointment, notwithstanding my controversial engagements and visits to the Indians of Rice Lake and Mud Lake. I largely composed on horseback sermons and replies to my ecclesiastical adversaries."*

But his work was not all done on horseback. Some of the good people of Cobourg used to see his study light burning on into the hours of the morning, and no doubt many of them thought there was a sad waste of strength and of good tallow candles. They did not know till later that the young preacher was writing those articles that completely refuted the ungenerous and untruthful aspersions cast upon the Methodist preachers and people by their privileged adversaries—writings which led, more than anything else, to the complete attainment of equal rights in this Canada of ours. I need scarcely say to any one acquainted with the history of this country, that the young minister was none other than Egerton Ryerson, who then and to his life's end declared that it was his greatest honor to be a Methodist preacher.

I shall now tell you something of the various places in which the Methodists of Cobourg met to worship and to hold sweet fellowship together. Though I now speak of things long gone by, I speak from the testimony of living witnesses from whose lips I have taken much of what I have to say.

* Ryerson's Story of My Life, page 80.

In 1823 there was a public school-house on the ground immediately south of this building. It was in that place that the first Methodist meetings were held. The preaching did not take place every Sunday, but only as the itinerant preacher came round to this part of his Circuit. A larger chapel, however, was at Hull's Corners, and that was the scene of the quarterly meetings, to which the people came up from far and near. At that early date, viz., 1823, a Sunday school was already established amongst Cobourg Methodists in the school-house of which I have spoken. A good man named Thaddeus Osgood, a Presbyterian, I believe, went through the country organizing Sunday schools in those early times, and the interest in Sunday schools and the sense of their importance was so great in the country that the Legislature of Upper Canada made a grant of £150 "for the use and encouragement of Sunday schools of indigent and remote settlements," to purchase reading "for moral and religious instruction." The second place of worship was a small wooden church, on the site where this church now stands. I cannot say just when it was built. It was not here, a living witness tells me, in 1823 or for some time after that, but another witness tells me that he found it in 1830, an old wooden frame building of about thirty by forty feet. Another member of this church describes it, as he first saw it in 1847, as "an old patched and most peculiarly arranged building. It had been enlarged once or twice, and still being too small for the constantly increasing population . . . it had been decided to put a gallery across the west end. But the ceiling being too low, that part of it under which the gallery was to be built had been removed and a sloping ceiling . . . had been made, extending from over the front of the gallery . . . to the rafters at the west end."

The next change was made in 1852, when this old wooden building was moved east of the present site and turned so as to face the north. So it stood whilst the new brick church was a-building. The new church was finished and handed over by the contractor, Mr. Charles Pomeroy, to the trustees on the 20th of July, 1853, the trustees expressing their entire satisfaction with the work.

Seven years later, in 1860, the new church was enlarged by extension to the east, providing 186 additional sittings, and by the addition of a gallery in the west end and a new brick vestry. Eight years pass, and in May, 1868, the organ was put in at a cost of about \$1350.

In 1869 the present side galleries were added and the building brought into the form in which you now see it.

I have in this brief account of the buildings made with hands passed over some years that will be remembered by thousands in Canada, and by many in other lands, when they hear of the church improvement now before us.

In 1832 the foundation of Upper Canada Academy was laid, and from 1836 to 1892 this was the church home of thousands of the brightest and best of the young people of our country. The academic advantages in this country, being with other advantages monopolized by the Church of England and refused to those who would not submit to her, our Canadian people, the Methodists and Presbyterians in particular, undertook to help themselves in these matters, and so God helped them. Upper Canada Academy was the first memorable accomplishment in this good work, and it has been followed by the complete removal of the abuse in opposition to which the college was founded, viz., sectarian control of higher education. Upper Canada Academy became later Victoria College and University. Thousands of students who spent their college years in this town, look back to it in gratitude and affection; and they will wish you God-speed and pray that the new things may be as good as the old.

I should not and I would not close this retrospect without a word of spiritual building, and of the stones cut and shaped here by the Great Architect and by his workmen for the building not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. It would take another evening to give only a sketch of that work and to recall with tender, loving interest the lively stones, the polished shafts, and stately pillars of the spiritual house that have in other years enriched and adorned this church. I cannot trust myself to speak of them by name, but you will think of them,

and their memory will bring you sweetness and light and strength.

You will thank God for one and another with whom you took sweet counsel together, as you came up to the House of the Lord. But the Lord has taken them to Himself—they are gone to be with Christ, which is far better. We will not think of them as far away. They are *with Him*, and He is “not far from any one of us.” Whilst, therefore, we now go back in thankful retrospect over all the way in which the Lord has led us, and look forward in hope to the way before us, you will not think of them as uninterested or absent though unseen,

“ Nor count me all to blame if I
 Conjecture of a stiller guest,
 Perchance, perchance among the rest,
 And, though in silence, wishing joy.”

Bear with me a moment longer in this retrospect, for there is one thing that has taken place in these last days which has contributed too much to the up-building of the Methodist Church to be passed over without mention. I mean the happy consummation of the reunion of the several branches of Methodism. The example of the brotherly love with which the brethren have come to dwell together in unity is one of the most goodly and pleasant things in the eyes of God and man. It seems most fitting that the new church should be a worthy thank-offering for and a memorial of the work of grace that has brought these various churches together without, so far as I know, one deed or word of which we should be ashamed in the presence of the great Lord and Master of us all.

So much for the retrospect. My last word is of the prospect. And the prospect that we all cherish is that in the new church the old spirit and the old truths may continue as from the beginning, the spirit of love and the truths of repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, of being born again, and of the witness of the Spirit with our spirits that we are the children of God. Of course I do not mean by this that we expect the Methodism of a hundred years hence to be

in all respects the same as the Methodism of to-day, not to say of a hundred years ago, but we hope and expect that it will be the same in spirit and life. I would despair of Methodism if I thought that its forms and methods would not change with the changing requirements and possibilities of the times. That would be a sure sign of a dead Church, but change and growth is the sure sign of the energies of life. How beautiful soever the bud and blossom may be, they must change and pass away, but how can we regret the change when the bud blows into the flower and the blossom ripens into the fruit? So may this church, and the Methodist Church throughout the world, grow from more to more, and hand on to the coming generations as flower and fruit what the generations past have bequeathed to us as bud and blossom.

Now unto Him that is able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory, to the wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

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